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### Language diversity and Community cohesion

**Citation for published version:**

Hancock, A 2008, Language diversity and Community cohesion: the challenges for educationalists in multilingual Scotland. in I Dirim, K Hauenschild, B Lütje-Klose, JM Löser & I Sievers (eds), *Ethnische Vielfalt und Mehrsprachigkeit an Schulen: Beispiele aus verschiedenen nationalen Kontexten*. Brandes and Apsel, Frankfurt, pp. 81-95.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Ethnische Vielfalt und Mehrsprachigkeit an Schulen

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

© Language diversity and Community cohesion : the challenges for educationalists in multilingual Scotland. / Hancock, Andrew.  
Ethnische Vielfalt und Mehrsprachigkeit an Schulen: Beispiele aus verschiedenen nationalen Kontexten. ed. / Inci Dirim; Katrin Hauenschild; Birgit Lütje-Klose ; Jessica M. Löser; Isabel Sievers. Frankfurt : Brandes and Apsel, 2008. p. 81-95.

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Hancock, A. (2008). Language diversity and Community cohesion: the challenges for educationalists in multilingual Scotland. In I. Dirim, . K. Hauenschild, B. Lütje-Klose , J. M. Löser, & I. Sievers (Eds.), *Ethnische Vielfalt und Mehrsprachigkeit an Schulen: Beispiele aus verschiedenen nationalen Kontexten*. (pp. 81-95). Frankfurt: Brandes and Apsel.

## **Introduction**

This article identifies and explores the current migration patterns shaping Scotland and the impact that an increasingly diverse and multilingual community is having on educationalists, schools and policy makers. At the outset, a distinction needs to be made between the various countries that make up the United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland). Previous to the creation of the new Scottish Executive<sup>1</sup> in mid-1999, educational policy and practice in Scotland had been an autonomous matter (along with the church and law) and historically has remained relatively distinctive from the ways of the rest of the UK. This independence manifests itself in a number of ways including policy related to the ways schools are organised and managed, national curriculum formation, assessment and qualifications arrangements, the training of teachers and the inspection of schools (Paterson, 2003). Notably, the way funding is allocated to services for the support of children and young people new to English is fundamentally different in England and Scotland.

## **Multilingual Scotland**

Recent statistics indicate that Scotland is a multilingual society. Information gathered for the School Census for Scotland in 2006 (of all publicly funded primary, secondary and special schools) confirms that children in Scotland come from a variety of heritages with 137 different languages spoken in the home. The main ethnic groups in order of number are Pakistani, Chinese and Indian and the main home languages are Punjabi, Urdu, Cantonese, Polish and Arabic.<sup>2</sup> The 2001 Census showed that Scotland's minority ethnic population is a young group with probable implications for

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Executive is the devolved (autonomous) Government in Scotland. It has the power to make laws on devolved matters such as education, health, Gaelic and social work.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/02/27083941>).

birth rates. Around 60% of minority ethnic people are under 30 years of age compared with just over 30% of the white population.

The need for educationalists to take account of the diverse nature of their schools continues to grow as a range of factors have seen the cultural and linguistic landscape change in Scotland in recent years. Demographic shifts mean Scotland is now anticipating a declining population and an increasingly ageing workforce. As a result, The Scottish Executive's response to this, unlike the rest of the UK, has been a different political face on the immigration debate, articulating a commitment to inward migration and actively encouraging migrant 'guest' workers and their families to live in Scotland in order to fill the existing skills gap. An example of such a measure put in place to address Scotland's demographic shortfall is the Executives' 'Fresh Talent' initiative which came into effect in 2005. This scheme has been successful in attracting highly skilled workers as it allows international students (and their children) to remain in Scotland and gain employment for two years after the completion of their studies without the need for a work permit (Scottish Executive, 2004).

The expansion of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 has seen Scotland receiving a higher proportion of new arrivals from new eastern European accession states, compared to the rest of the UK. Thus, in recent years, schools across Scotland are likely to have seen children of different linguistic backgrounds; a situation that previously existed only in areas around large cities. For example, children new to English are now enrolling into schools in the rural and coastal regions of the Highlands where Polish, Czech, Latvian and Lithuanian workers have been recruited for the fish processing plants, the construction industry and catering establishments. Despite high levels of education these migrants are generally associated with unskilled, low- paid employment and poor housing. Recent research suggests that their stay may not be as temporary as originally expected especially when they have their children living with them (Markova and Black, 2007). This situation has corresponding implications for the provision and planning of language support for these children.

Issues relating to immigration are still a reserved matter to be managed by the UK government<sup>3</sup>. However, changes in immigration and asylum policies in 1999 provided the legal basis for large numbers of refugee and asylum seeking families to be dispersed from England to Scotland. Research shows that refugee and asylum-seeking families are more likely to have young children under the age of five than other families and more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion (Hyder, 1998).

Most of the asylum seeker families in Scotland are Muslim, and originate from a range of countries identified by Amnesty International as experiencing war, conflict and persecution (such as Pakistan, Somalia, Congo, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq and Zimbabwe). As well as language support and skilled induction into nurseries and schools children of asylum seekers may also require specialist help because of the displacement and trauma resulting from the experiences that led them to leave their country of birth (Closs et al, 2001, Rutter, 2003). Recently, in Scotland there have been a number of high profile cases of 'dawn raids' and forced deportation of young people and incidences of children kept in detention centres without access to mainstream schooling stipulated by United Nation conventions (Walker, 2007).

All the above migratory factors have resulted in increasing cultural and linguistic diversity across Scotland with a subsequent need for educational establishments to engage with issues of multilingualism and race equality within policy and practice arenas (Arshad and Diniz, 2003). However, it is important to stress the obvious but crucial point that not all minority ethnic families are homogeneous with the same needs and experiences. Refer to Hancock (2006) who has captured the heterogeneous nature of a minority ethnic community in Scotland in terms of migration histories, sociolinguistic profiles, beliefs and attitudes. According to the CRE (2006) it is not enough to argue that policies must 'meet the needs of ethnic minority communities' but information must be detailed enough to pick up the distinctions between and within groups and to develop educational services accordingly.

## **Language Education**

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<sup>3</sup> Some issues concerning Scotland that have a UK or international impact are dealt with by the UK Parliament in London. These 'reserved matters' include foreign affairs, defence and national security.

The introduction in 2002 of free universal part-time, early years education and care for three and four year olds has seen increasing numbers of minority ethnic children attend early years settings and the subsequent exposure to English within a learning environment. However, research in this area suggests that barriers still exist for some migrant families in accessing childcare (Bell et al, 2005). Reasons for the low uptake of early years services are complex, but they include lack of information, frequent moves and lack of familiarity with early years services. One study showed that some refugee mothers felt uncomfortable about leaving young children in the care of adults from outside their community where no one spoke their language (Rutter and Hyder, 1998).

There is a consensus in the literature that suggests that early years settings can offer good quality provision where children from linguistic minorities can integrate, build new friendships and develop their English language skills (Sylva, et al. 2003). These stages of additional language acquisition are well documented by Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000). However, these young children need to learn a new language and access the early years curriculum through an additional language, but these children frequently do not have sufficient competency in English to interact with native speaking peers who provide important friendships and correct models of the target language. Tabors (1997) describes this as the classic double-bind that young children learning a new language must face:

in order to learn this new language, [children] must be socially accepted by those who speak the language; but to be socially accepted, [they] must already be able to speak the new language

(Tabors, 1997:35)

Such social interactions need to be carefully monitored, and, if necessary, supported, by staff. Detailed ethnographic accounts of three and four-year-old minority ethnic children's first days at nursery are provided by Thompson (2000) and Drury (2007). The authors argue that children need additional support for their early socialisation experiences as they move into new environments.

Scotland may have a rich multilingual profile but the educational response to this linguistic diversity has largely been to ignore this language learning potential, a valuable life skill for both individuals and society. According to Skutnebb-Kangas

(2000) this policy context means linguistic minority children are ‘submerged’ into a new language, and the languages already spoken are not used for educational purposes but remain restricted to family networks. The majority language thus constitutes a threat to child’s first language which runs the risk of being displaced or replaced. That is to say the educational outcome is monolingualism, or at best, limited bilingualism where learners are forced to assimilate into the majority culture and learn the language of the dominant society as soon as possible. This subtractive bilingual policy context is in stark contrast to the provision increasingly introduced in Scotland for Gaelic medium education and the teaching of European languages, where the education objective is academic and cultural enrichment (Landon, 2001).

This language policy approach echoes Beacco and Bryman (2003) assertion that when monolingualism is the norm it introduces:

antagonistic relationships between languages in that it leads some languages receiving preferential treatment and a radical distinction being made between the national/official language(s) and all the others

Beacco and Bryman (2003: 10)

Smyth (2003), who captured the dominant discourse of educationalists in the west of Scotland, showed that teachers’ construction of language learning was perceived exclusively in terms of English. There was also a perception that a parent who spoke a language other than English at home would inhibit their child’s acquisition of English. Smyth argued that these taken-for-granted practices are based on long established cultural mindsets that believe that children have to become monolingual in order to succeed in the educational system. This belief is certainly at odds with empirical research evidence, which shows that the learning of two or more languages increases cognitive and literate abilities and broadens the child's outlook on life (Bialystok, 2001, Thomas and Collier, 2002). Conversely, research shows that a failure to develop children’s skills in their first language can have detrimental effects on their later achievement (Cummins, 2000). Clearly, much more needs to be done to prepare teachers for the reality of multilingual classrooms across Europe (Hancock *et al*, 2006).

Recently, increasing numbers of bilingual support assistants have been recruited in Scotland, and their first language skills have provided a valuable channel to support

children's early literacy skills (Landon, 1999) but the focus still remains on the speedy transition to English as the sole means of literacy development rather than build on the language resource they already possess.

The planning and delivery of provision for the language education of children and young people with English as an additional language (EAL) in Scotland are determined at Local Authority level<sup>4</sup> with minimal guidance from the Scottish Parliament on what is considered the most effective pedagogy for supporting increasing numbers of new arrivals. In fact the term 'bilingual' rarely features in Scottish policy documents and the national priorities for Scottish education only makes reference to the pejorative term 'speakers of lesser used languages.' Not surprisingly, this only reinforces the negative connotations of bilingualism frequently held amongst large sections of public opinion.

This language policy vacuum has resulted in an ad hoc arrangement across Scotland in terms of support services and funding for bilingual pupils. These autonomous ways of working range from one authority for example, which advocates full inclusion of learners in mainstream classrooms with an accompanying strategic whole school approach to all English language learners working in partnership with class and subject teachers. On the other hand, an authority with a similar size of school pupil population has retained an approach of placing some new arrivals into Language Units despite condemnation from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) who considers such segregated provision as a form of institutionalised racism (CRE, 1986). The argument put forward by the CRE is that withdrawing children and young people from mainstream classrooms results in stigmatization and reinforces the notion of 'deficit' and 'difference'. This provision also restricts learners' contact with native-English speaking peers and access to the full curriculum available in schools.

With the exception of Gaelic there are presently very few opportunities available within mainstream schools for speakers of minority languages to develop their skills. Urdu and Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese) is best served, where it is taught as a modern foreign language in a small number of secondary schools. It is therefore left to

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<sup>4</sup> There are 32 directly elected local authorities in Scotland which provide local services such as

minority communities and concerned parents to organise complementary schools to develop their heritage languages.

Recent research by McPake (2006) has shown that the extent and nature of such provision in Scotland is very variable. While there are some excellent initiatives, and the level of commitment among volunteers is high, many complementary schools are severely hampered by lack of funds, scarce teaching and learning materials and absence of professional development opportunities for their teachers. According to McPake (2006) these complementary schools continue to suffer from lack of official recognition and status. Furthermore, for many languages, there is no provision at all and Scotland is therefore not currently in a good position to take advantage of its linguistic resources.

Regrettably, the educational activity and achievements of children attending complementary schools is largely unacknowledged or often viewed with suspicion by mainstream teachers. This is despite recent seminal ethnographic research, conducted in England (but absent in Scotland), which highlights the potential creative interaction that can occur when cultures and languages come into contact in such schools. These studies show how literacy skills learnt outside mainstream schools are transferred to other learning contexts (Bhatt *et al*, 2004; Kenner, 2004; Robertson, 2004). On the other hand, Skutnabb-Kangas, (1988: 29) argues that this type of provision is ‘more therapeutic cosmetics than language teaching’ as children are unable to develop their first language skills to a sophisticated and academic level.

### **Community Cohesion**

Recently the political discourse in the UK has shifted away from the longstanding promotion of multi-culturalism and the acceptance of ‘difference’ to a concept of ‘community cohesion’ which explores the development of a stable and integrated society at a neighbourhood level (Zetter et al, 2006). Nevertheless, ‘community cohesion’ remains a contentious notion and for some scholars means little more than assimilation and absorption of minority ethnic cultures and languages into the dominant culture and language. The general trend is demonstrated by calls from

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education and receive a large part of their funding from the Executive.



politicians in the British Parliament for English language requirements alongside British citizenship tests for migrants to achieve a cohesive national identity (BBC, 2005). Conversely, some view the path to integration as a two-way process - with consultation and opportunities created for minority groups to engage more effectively with wider society whilst at the same time a government agenda making assertive efforts to promote meaningful intercultural dialogue, tackle racism, discrimination and marginalization. A recent report from the UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC, 2007) indicates that schools play a key role in promoting integration and cohesion by teaching children about equality and diversity and the report also encourages young people to see their language skills as a national asset.

Hansen (2003) believes there are a number of necessary conditions for successful integration such as equality of outcome which enables minority groups to achieve levels of educational achievement comparable to those of the broader population. However, detailed analysis of the educational progress of migrant children in Scotland is difficult to obtain. What is known is that the level of qualifications held by adults varies by age. Generally, older persons from Pakistani and Chinese communities are more likely to have no qualifications compared to white Scottish people (2001 Census). Some minority ethnic children and young people are performing well and are more likely to enter University than the white population (Chinese girls for example), but at the same time anecdotal evidence indicates that children from some minority groups are seriously underachieving in education and are more likely to be inappropriately assessed as having learning difficulties.

Data on the achievement of minority ethnic pupils at school has been gathered annually in England over the last decade (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; DfES, 2006) but unfortunately, the picture in Scotland lacks robust empirical evidence (CRE, 2006). According to the Commission for Racial Equality (2006) without reliable and comprehensive ethnic monitoring (as required by the Race Relations Act, 2000) policy is being developed in an information vacuum. This scant data means any patterns of inequality or shortcomings in provision cannot be easily identified nor can remedies to tackle under-achievement be put in place (Blair et al, 1998).

A further cornerstone of community cohesion is harmonious race-relations. But according to research conducted by Arshad *et al* (2004:117), minority ethnic children

and young people reported, without exception, racist incidents such as name-calling, harassment and bullying in social relationships and while traveling to and from school. This lack of protection from racist behaviour is also echoed in other research in both primary and secondary schools in Scotland (Donald *et al*, 1994; Hill *et al*. 2007). The consequences of everyday experience of racism at school and in the community can lead to low self-esteem and social exclusion for children from minority groups. Similarly, statistics indicate that people of minority ethnic backgrounds in Scotland are twice as likely to be victims of crime as others (Adams, 2007). This is as a result of both racially aggravated crime and socio-economic factors (Platt, 2007). This situation is compounded by ambiguous or hostile media messages which fuel anxieties about migration amongst the host community. Research by Zetter *et al* (2006) claims that the media portrayal of ‘parallel communities’, religious extremism and inter-ethnic tension impacts negatively on a person’s own sense of identity, educational outcomes and employment opportunities.

It may be argued that greater cultural, ethnic and religious plurality challenges perceptions of integration and a cohesive ‘national identity’ (Oakley, 1996). Today the majority of minority ethnic children have been born and raised in Scotland. To a varying extent they have been exposed to the dominant language and culture since starting nursery or school but their linguistic choices and ways of learning is complex and dynamic as they move in and out of different social and cultural contexts. Research shows that these young people are creating their own multilingual identities within a rapidly changing globalised world. Examples of young people’s expertise in different languages and affiliation to various cultural and religious heritages has been captured effectively by Leung (1997) and Martin –Jones and Bhatt (2000).

### **Policy, Research and Practice**

My intention is to flag up some of the developments in Scotland since constitutional change, in terms of policy, research and practice, which reflect a growing interest in cultural and linguistic diversity. It would be naive to suggest that any of these initiatives can or should be replicated and applied to a different European context. The following section should, therefore, be viewed as a stimulus for debate rather than a panacea to the challenges facing policy makers and educationalists across Europe as they respond to increasingly diverse schools.

A significant development in Scotland has been the establishment of an inquiry into the role of educational and cultural policy in supporting and developing Gaelic, Scots and minority languages in Scotland. Evidence submitted to the Parliamentary committee has generated an important dialogue within political and policy making circles about the role and place of languages in education in Scotland. The Inquiry recognised that Gaelic, Scots and minority languages need to be taken forward together and to have equal status as the languages of Scotland. Of interest is the conclusion contained within the report on the inquiry which states that 'the many questions and concerns surrounding the languages of Scotland and their place in education and culture can only be properly addressed by creating an inclusive, cohesive Languages Policy' (2003:19).

A commitment to promoting multilingualism under a synchronised language strategy for Scotland is to be welcomed, and although the process is still on-going we await with interest the results of the Inquiry's recommendation for substantive research, consultation and reporting to gather further information on the specific needs of the diverse languages speakers of Scotland. It is hoped this will bring about some harmonious and shared policy development across the different language education fields and provide advice on how language teaching can best be integrated in the life-long learning process from the early years onwards.

As already stated, there has been limited systematic ethnic monitoring of academic achievement in Scotland. One positive step forward is The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which followed the publication of a major government report (The Macpherson Report, 1999) as a result of a highly publicised racist murder in London. The Act now places a general duty on Education authorities to assess the impact of their policies on children and young people of different racial groups, with particular reference to their attainment levels. There is also a requirement to address the shortage of minority ethnic teachers and make the workforce more representative of the communities they serve.

Recent legislation has explicitly raised the profile of bilingual learners in Scottish educational establishments. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2004 introduced a new framework to provide for children and young people who

require additional support with their learning. This new definition is based on the feeling that there are some pupils who didn't have any particular kind of learning need but who do need some additional support in order to benefit from their educational experience. As a result, the new terminology also incorporates pupils who have English as an additional language alongside Gypsies and Travellers and those who are able and gifted. The Supporting Children's Learning *Code of Practice* (2005) provides helpful advice for schools on implementing the terms of the Act. It specifies that:

A need for additional support does not imply that a child or young person lacks abilities and skills. For example, bilingual children or young people, whose first language is not English, may already have a fully developed home language and a wide range of achievements, skills and abilities. Any lack of English should be addressed within a learning and teaching programme which takes full account of the individual's abilities and learning needs.

(Scottish Executive, 2005: 20)

In addition the new legislation gives more rights to parents to be involved in the decision-making process and the code of practice specifically mentions the importance of including interpreters in this procedure.

In 2005, the Scottish Executive published new guidelines for all schools to ensure effective inclusion for learners with English as an Additional language. The title of this document, *Learning in 2(+) Languages* (LTS, 2005), seeks to inform educators of bilingual issues and appropriate pedagogy. Following quickly on from these guidelines, the Educational Inspectorate recognised the growing need for schools to take more responsibility for evaluating their educational provision for bilingual learners and guidelines have been produced outlining effective ways to self-monitor this (HMIe, 2006).

In 2001, a project was funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) following recommendations made in the Macpherson Report (1999) regarding the need to include anti-racism within the curriculum in schools. The aim of the project (Antiracist Toolkit, 2006) is to develop staff development resources, in consultation with teachers, to address race equality in education. The material includes advice to schools on raising awareness about racist incidents and how to deal with them.

In contrast with the rest of the UK, a national infrastructure for supporting research into language education has a strong foundation in Scotland. Funded by the Scottish Executive and coordinated by Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching (SCILT) this research agenda has generated a number of substantive projects directly related to informing future decisions on language policy, provision and practice. Two projects are worthy of note here. Firstly, *Mapping the Languages of Edinburgh* (McPake, 2002) surveyed children, starting secondary school, about the languages they knew and where they had acquired them (i.e. home, community, school or elsewhere). It concluded that the plurilingual population in Edinburgh was far greater than generally believed. This research is an important step forward in gathering data on the extent of linguistic diversity in Scotland and complements similar projects across Europe, such as Multilingual Capital, which captured the languages of London's schoolchildren and their relevance to economic, social and educational policies (Baker and Eversley, 2000). Secondly, research into Gaelic immersion programmes in Scotland highlighted the associated cognitive and social benefits for children developing bilingual skills (Johnson et al, 1999). This study showed that Gaelic-medium pupils, by the end of Primary school, were significantly ahead of their English-medium counterparts in the same schools in mathematics as well as in and reading and writing in English.

It is hoped that by sharing aspects of the journey Scotland is currently embarked upon to improve the life chances of children and young people from minority backgrounds that some common issues and helpful areas for further professional discourse will emerge.

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